



332 of 1020 DOCUMENTS

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SALISBURY -- Sen. J. Lowell Stoltzfus, R-38-Somerset, told supporters Saturday that while Gov. Robert Ehrlich's administration has been successful, challenges still lay ahead during the next legislative session.

Despite rainy conditions all afternoon, Stoltzfus' annual "Picnic in the Park" political rally was still attended with well-wishers who wanted to hear from the senator.

"You all are definitely not fair-weather friends -- you're my all-weather friends," he said. "I didn't think five or 10 people would show up, but some of you are still here until the bitter end."

During the Salisbury City Park event, people ate barbecue and competed for door prizes and auction items while the Maryland senate minority leader gave them a preview of what might happen during the state's next legislative session.

But first, Luis Luna, assistant administrator for the Office of Administration and Resources Management at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, told the crowd about how the country is trying to shore up its energy supply.

Luna, who lives in Salisbury, said the objective is to develop other sources of energy -- such as wind, solar and bio-diesel -- to augment the United States' reliance on oil.

"Finding balance is the key," said Luna. "We need to diversify our options and explore and expand upon them."

Without finding alternatives, Luna said, the United States will always be at a disadvantage.

"When we put all of our our energy eggs in one basket, we're asking for trouble," he said.

Yet for all the federal government is doing to help residents, Luna said, strong leaders such as Stoltzfus on the state,

county and municipal level are the most important of all public officials.

With that notion, Stoltzfus said Ehrlich has made some large strides during his three-year tenure in office, one of which was turning around the state's large deficit into a surplus.

However, Stoltzfus said, Ehrlich's accomplishments will not make things any easier when state legislators meet in January.

Stoltzfus said there was good possibility some lawmakers will try to impose more taxes while trying to overturn some of Ehrlich's vetoes from the past session and probe his firing practices while in office.

"We have some tremendous changes, but next year is going to be tough," he said. "But the bottom line is that we're here to take care of people."

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